



DIVIDED AMERICA: PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT UNITES AND DIVIDES THE COUNTRY

Large numbers of Americans see their country as divided over values and politics, and they do not expect those schisms to shrink any time soon. But the recent poll conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research also finds most Americans say members of their own community agree on important values, and they feel they have a lot in common with their neighbors.

While few Americans say they have much in common with people of different religions or ethnic backgrounds, most of the public believes the racial, ethnic, and religious diversity of the United States makes the country stronger.

The nationwide poll of 1,008 adults was part of the AmeriSpeak® Omnibus, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC at the University of Chicago's probability-based panel. Interviews were conducted between June 23 and 27, 2016, online and using landlines and cell phones.

Some of the poll's key findings are:

- Eighty percent of Americans say the country is greatly divided when it comes to the most important values, and 85 percent say the United States is increasingly divided by politics.
- While few people think the country as a whole agrees about values, most say their neighbors do share important values. Six in 10 (62 percent) say members of their local community are in agreement about values.
- Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) say the news media puts too much focus on disagreements, and 63 percent say the same about politicians and elected officials. The entertainment industry is seen by 43 percent as overemphasizing splits within the country.



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Three Things You Should Know about The AP-NORC Poll on Divided America: Among All American Adults

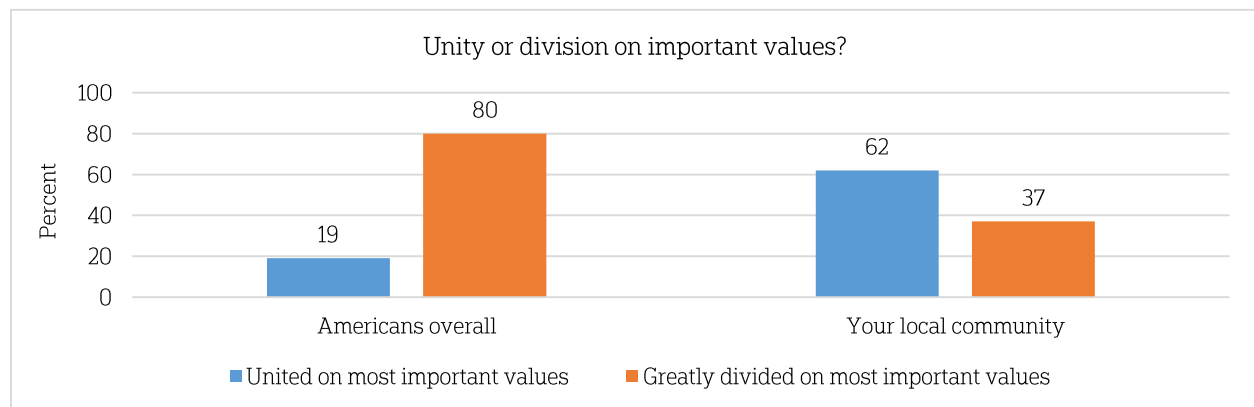
- 1) Eighty percent say Americans are divided on most important values, and 85 percent say the country is more politically divided today than it was in the past.
- 2) Most Americans (56 percent) say diversity makes the United States stronger, 16 percent say it makes the country weaker, and 28 percent say it has no effect.
- 3) Neither candidate for President is seen as capable of uniting the country. But, while 43 percent say Clinton's election would increase division, 73 percent say that about Trump's election.

- Most Americans regard the country’s diverse population as advantageous to the nation. More than half (56 percent) say diversity makes the country stronger, while 16 percent say it weakens the country. Twenty-eight percent say diversity has no effect one way or the other. Democrats, urbanites, and Hispanics are particularly inclined to see the variety of people in the country as a plus for the United States.
- Is the United States the best country on earth? Only 26 percent of the public agree that the United States “stands above all other countries in the world,” while 55 percent of the public say the United States is “one of the greatest countries in the world along with some others.” Just 19 percent think there are other countries that are better.
- The public is closely divided over whether the good times for the country have been left behind or are yet to come. Fifty-two percent say the country’s best days are in the past, while 46 percent say they are ahead of us. Blacks and Hispanics tend to have a positive outlook about the future of the country, while most whites say the good times are in the past.
- While most people say they have a lot in common with other members of their community, few feel they share much in common with wealthier people or those with different political views.
- Neither the Democratic nor the Republican candidate for President is regarded as particularly capable of uniting the country. However, while 43 percent say Hillary Clinton’s election would lead to a more divided nation, many more, 73 percent, say the country will be more separated if Donald Trump prevails in November.

MOST AMERICANS THINK THE COUNTRY IS DIVIDED, AND FEW THINK THAT WILL CHANGE IN THE COMING YEARS.

Eighty percent of the public sees the country as divided when it comes to the most important values. While the public sees Americans nationwide as largely divided, most say their neighbors share important values. Six in 10 say members of their local community are in agreement about values; 4 in 10 say they are greatly divided.

Americans see their own communities as mostly united on important values but see the country as a whole as divided.

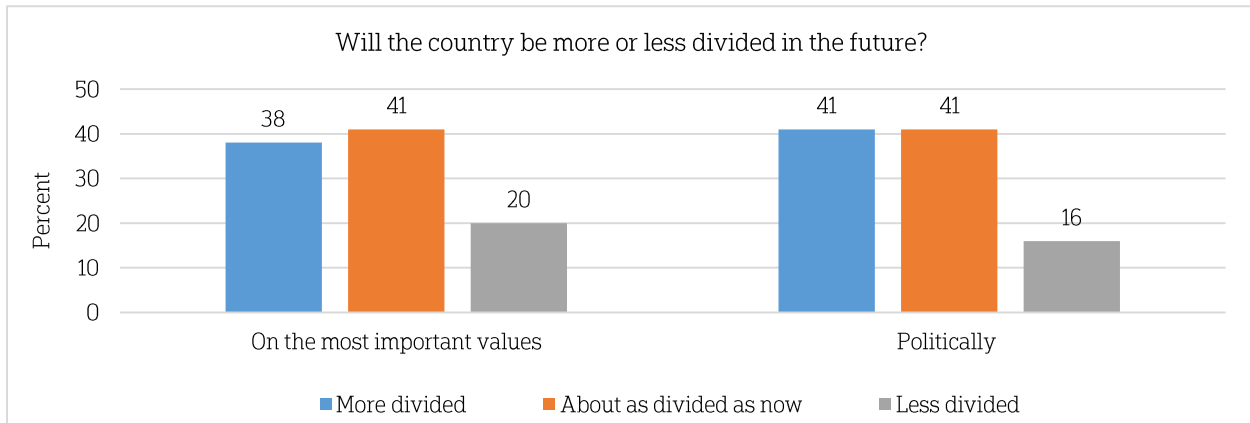


Questions: Which statement comes closer to your own view? Americans are united and in agreement about the most important values, or Americans are greatly divided when it comes to the most important values? Which statement comes closer to your own view about your local community? Members of your local community are united and in agreement about the most important values, or members of your local community are greatly divided when it comes to the most important values?

More than 8 in 10 Americans say the country is more politically divided these days than it was in the past. Partisans are more likely than non-partisans to say the country is at odds politically. Ninety percent of Republicans and 86 percent of Democrats say so compared to 68 percent of independents.

Few expect the country’s divisions to fade any time soon. Only 20 percent say the country will become less divided on important values over the next five years, while 4 in 10 percent expect to see more rifts over values, and about as many think it will remain the same. Similar feelings emerge regarding political differences specifically.

Most say the country will remain as divided or become more divided in the future.



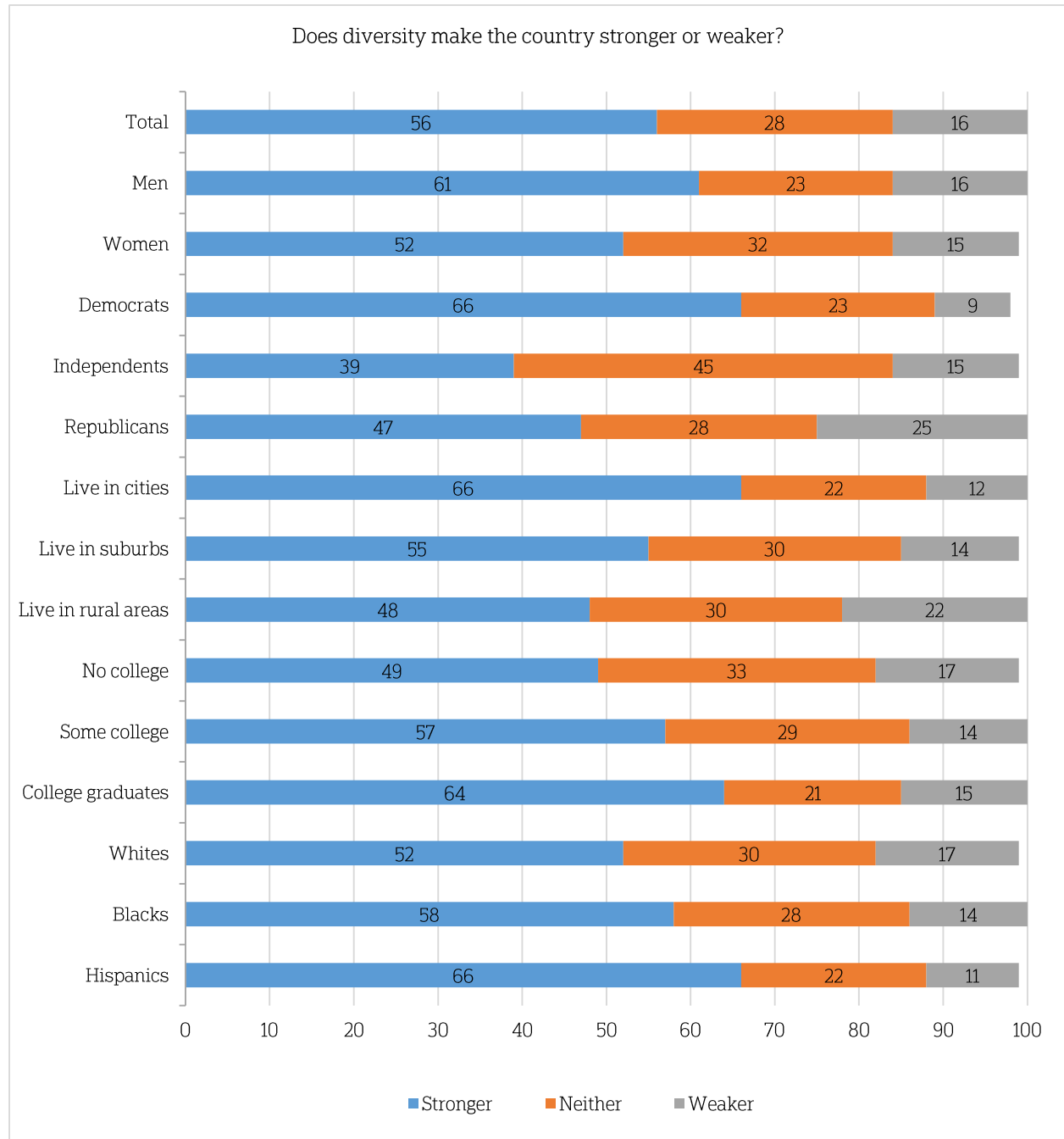
Questions: And thinking about five years from now, do you think the country will become more divided on the most important values, less divided on the most important values, or be about as divided as it is now? And thinking about five years from now, do you think the country will become more politically divided, less politically divided, or about as politically divided as it is now?

Although the country is seen as divided on values, most Americans consider the country’s diverse population a benefit to the United States. More than half say the variety of people makes the country stronger, while 16 percent say it weakens the country. Nearly 3 in 10 say diversity has no effect one way or the other.

Differences emerge by party identification, gender, location, education, and race. Democrats are more likely to say having a population with various backgrounds makes the country stronger compared to Republicans or independents. Men, urbanites, college educated adults, and Hispanics are more likely to say having a mix of ethnicities makes the country stronger, while people living in rural areas and less educated people tend to say diversity has no effect or makes the country weaker.

People with positive views of Clinton have different views on this subject than those with favorable opinions of Trump. Seventy percent of Americans with a favorable opinion of Clinton say diversity makes the country stronger, while 41 percent of people who feel favorably toward Trump agree.

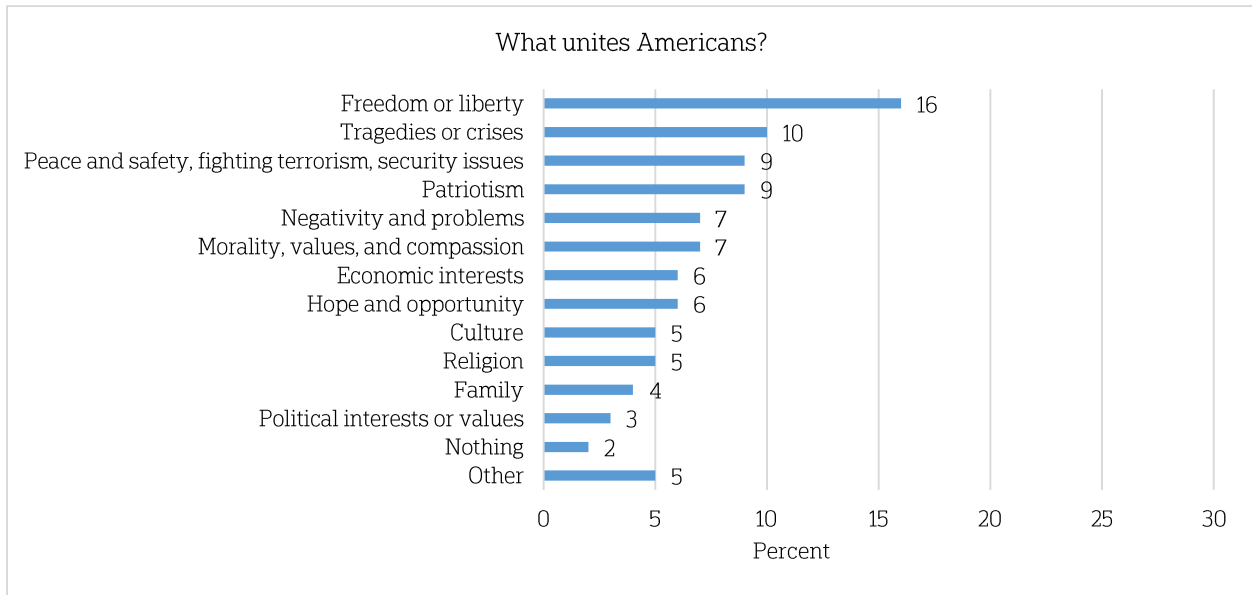
The effect of a diverse population varies by different demographic groups.



Question: The United States has a diverse population with people of many different races, ethnicities, religions, and backgrounds. Do you think this diversity makes the country much stronger, moderately stronger, neither stronger nor weaker, moderately weaker, much weaker?

When asked what unites most Americans, freedom or liberty is most frequently mentioned. One in 10 say the country is united by tragedy and crises, and just about as many mention security issues or terrorism.

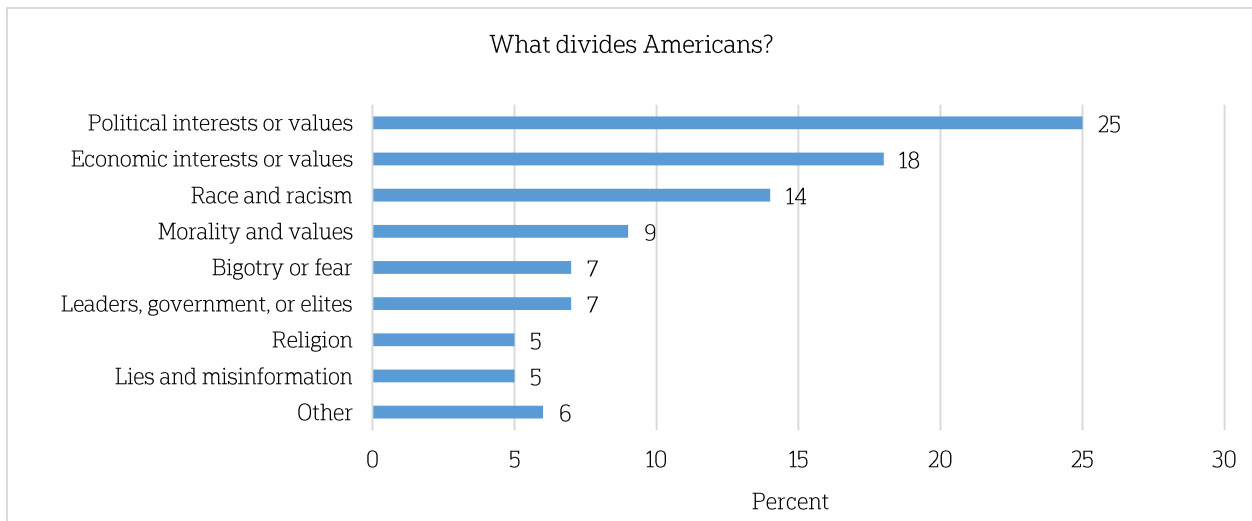
Freedom or liberty were mentioned most often as the main thing that unites Americans.



Question: What do you think is the main thing that unites most Americans?

As for what divides Americans, the top response is politics, followed by economic interests. Racism was mentioned by 14 percent.

Political interests and values were mentioned most often as the main thing that divides Americans.

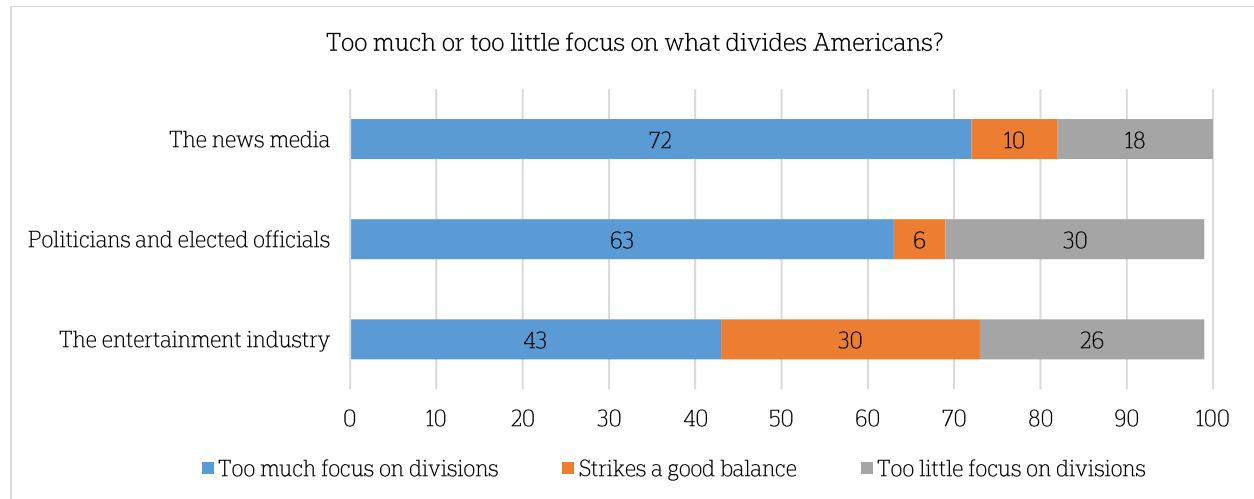


Question: What do you think is the main thing that divides most Americans?

MOST AMERICANS SAY THE NEWS MEDIA AND POLITICIANS FOCUS TOO MUCH ON CONFLICT.

Americans say there is too much focus on discord in the country.. More than 7 in 10 say the news media puts too much focus on what divides Americans, more than 6 in 10 say the same about politicians and elected officials, and 4 in 10 say so about the entertainment industry.

Many Americans say the news media and politicians overemphasize conflict.



Question: Thinking about conflict and divisions in the United States, do you think [ITEM] put too much focus on what divides Americans, put too little focus on what divides Americans, or strike a good balance?

Whites are more likely than Hispanics to say that the news media focuses too much on divisions (76 percent vs. 63 percent), as are those with a college degree compared to those without (80 percent vs. 68 percent).

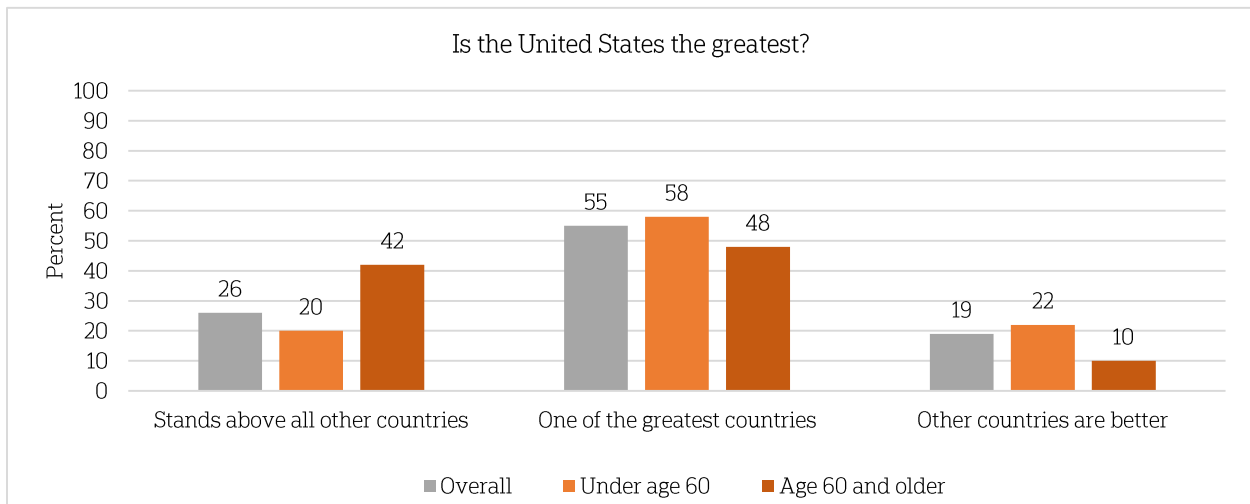
Less affluent Americans are more inclined to say that politicians do not concentrate enough on the country's divisions (36 percent vs. 25 percent for those earning \$50,000 or more).

MOST AMERICANS SAY THE UNITED STATES IS ONE OF THE BEST COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD, BUT ITS BEST DAYS ARE IN THE PAST.

Is the United States the greatest country in the world? Most Americans say it is pretty special but not better than some other nations. About a quarter say the United States stands above all other countries in the world, while 55 percent see the United States as one of the greatest countries in the world along with some others. Only a fifth think there are other countries that are better. Older Americans are more likely to regard the country as the best in the world.

Republicans are more likely than Democrats or independents to say America stands above other countries and less likely to say there are other countries that are better. Forty percent of people with a favorable view of Trump say the country stands above all others; 27 percent of those with a favorable opinion of Clinton agree.

Older Americans are particularly likely to say the United States stands above all other countries in the world.



Question: Which of these statements best describes your opinion about the United States? Stands above all other countries in the world, is one of the greatest countries in the world along with some others, or there are other countries better than the United States?

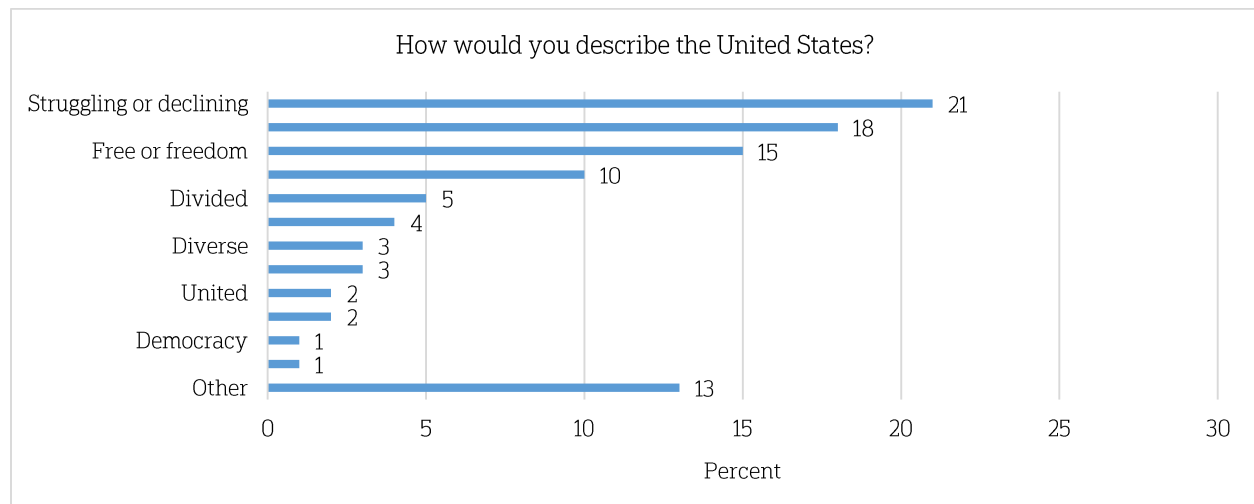
Are the country’s best days behind us or yet to come? Americans are closely divided: 52 percent say the best days are in the past, and 46 percent expect to see good times ahead.

Democrats are most optimistic about the future. More than half of them (54 percent) say America’s best days are ahead of it compared to just 37 percent of Republicans. Similarly, 61 percent of those with a favorable opinion of Clinton say the country’s best days are yet to come, while only 39 percent of those with a positive view of Trump agree.

Blacks are much more positive about the future than whites. Sixty-two percent think Americans best days are ahead. Just 40 percent of whites say the same. And, those who live in urban areas are more likely than those in rural areas to express optimism about where America is headed (55 percent vs. 35 percent).

When asked what one word they would use to describe the country, the public’s answers vary: from prosperous to struggling, wonderful to confused. Overall, just as about as many positive words were mentioned as negative terms, Responses in the other category range from ignorant to patriotic to large.

Many Americans see the United States as struggling or declining, but a portion also view it as great, prosperous, or powerful.

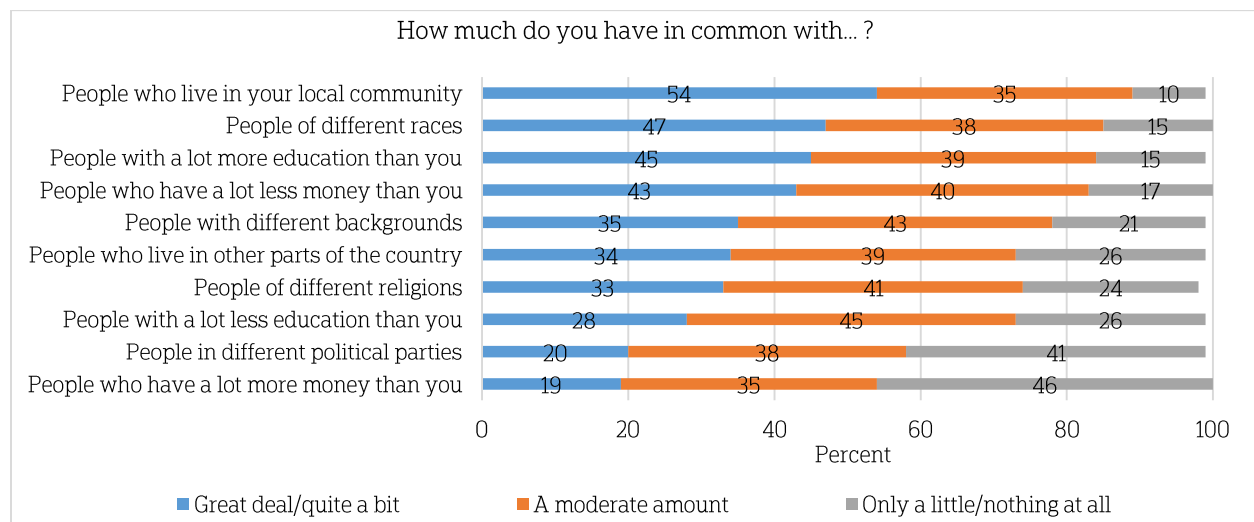


Question: What one word would you use to describe the United States?

AMERICANS SAY THEY HAVE THE MOST IN COMMON WITH THEIR NEIGHBORS, WHILE FEW FEEL THEY SHARE MUCH IN COMMON WITH THOSE WHO EARN MORE OR ARE FROM OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES.

Americans feel a strong connection to people who live in their community but don't think they share as much in common with many other groups. Fifty-four percent say they have a great deal or quite a bit in common with other people who live in their community. Less than half feel they have much in common with people of different races, people with more education than them, and those who earn less money than them. On the other hand, more than 4 in 10 say they have very little or nothing at all in common with those who earn more money or have different political views.

People feel they and their neighbors are most alike and have the least amount in common with wealthier people and those from different political parties.



Question: How much do you feel you have in common with the following types of people? [ITEM]

Americans tend to feel connected to those who are less affluent and more educated. About 4 in 10 say they have a great deal or quite a bit in common with people who have a lot less money than they do. About the same number say they have a lot in common with people with a lot more education.

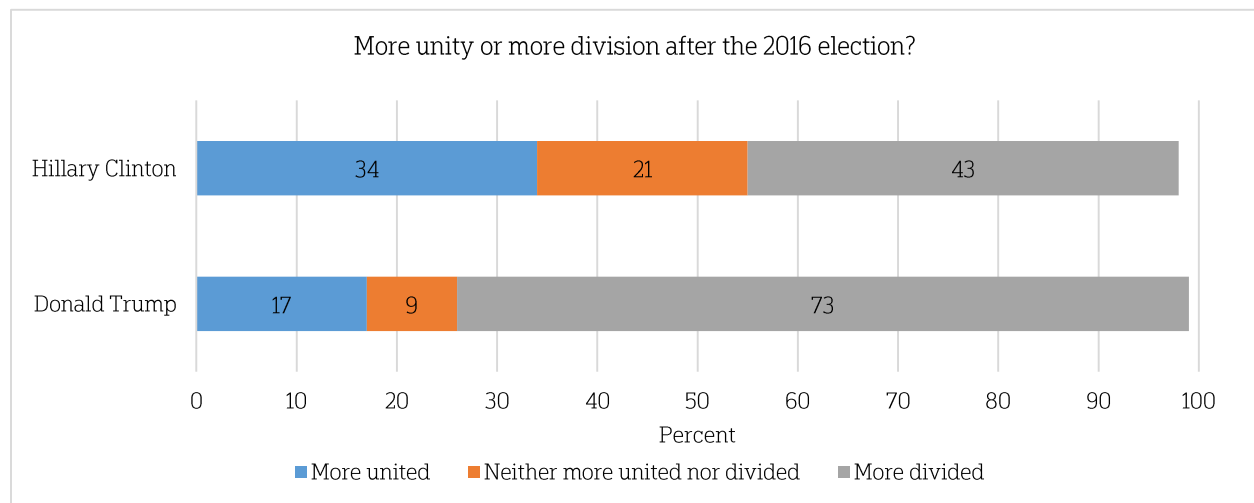
Politics and wealth divide people the most. Only about 20 percent say they share a lot with people from different political parties. About the same number have a lot in common with people with much more money.

NEITHER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE IS SEEN AS A UNIFYING FORCE, BUT A POTENTIAL TRUMP PRESIDENCY IS CONSIDERED MORE DIVISIVE.

While the public doesn't expect either candidate to unify the country, Americans are much more likely to say a Trump presidency would lead to the country being more divided.

Only 17 percent say Trump's election would unite the country, and 72 percent say it would make the United States more divided. Clinton fares slightly better, with twice as many (34 percent) saying she would make the country more united and less than half (43 percent) saying she would make the country more divided.

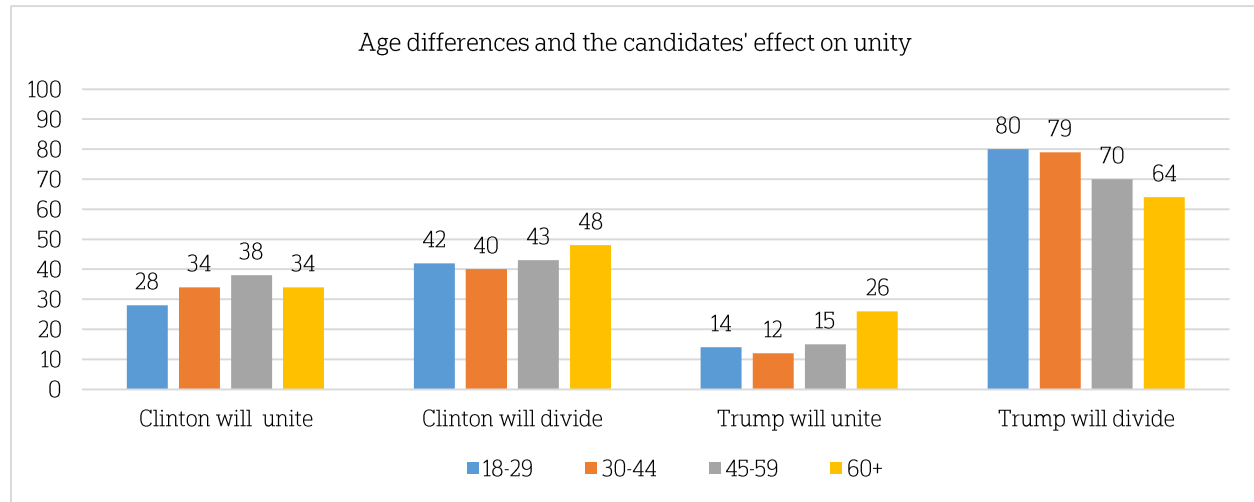
Nearly three-quarters of Americans say Trump's election would lead to a more divided America.



Question: For each of the following individuals, please tell me if you feel their election to the presidency would lead to the country being more united or more divided: [ITEM].

Beyond the expected differences by party identification, Americans have different views based on their age, race, and ethnicity. Blacks (71 percent) are most likely to say Clinton will unite the country, followed by Hispanics (49 percent), then whites (just 21 percent). Whites are most likely to say she will divide the country. People under age 30 are more likely to say Trump will further divide the country than those over age 30 (79 percent vs. 71 percent). Those age 60 and older are more likely to say he will unite the country than those under age 60 (26 percent vs. 13 percent).

Older Americans are less likely to say Trump’s election will further divide the country.



Question: For each of the following individuals, please tell me if you feel their election to the presidency would lead to the country being more united or more divided: [ITEM].

ABOUT THE STUDY

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Data were collected using AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC’s probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face).

Interviews for this survey were conducted between June 23 and 27, 2016, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,008 completed the survey—773 via the web and 235 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 29.5 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 18.2 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 91.1 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 4.9 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and household phone status. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or lower) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling.

A comprehensive listing of the questions, complete with tabulations of top-level results for each question, is available on The AP-NORC Center website: www.apnorc.org.

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